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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000707

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [CU](#) [EI](#) [MX](#)
SUBJECT: IRELAND/CUBA: UPCOMING MINISTERIAL VISIT AND
READINESS TO ACCEPT GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, Robert J. Faucher: Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Ireland's Foreign Minister publicly announced plans for an official visit to Cuba in mid-February, a first for any Irish Minister. He also signaled Ireland's willingness to accept Guantanamo detainees as part of an EU response to any plan to close Guantanamo proposed by the incoming U.S. administration. EU Foreign Ministers will discuss the EU approach at their January 8, 2009, informal meeting in Prague. Once an EU position is adopted, Ireland would likely accept up to five detainees at most. End Summary.

Cuba

¶2. (U) Irish Foreign Minister Micheal Martin announced to the press December 28 that he will visit Cuba in mid-February 2009. Martin will be the first Irish Minister ever to visit Cuba in an official capacity.

¶3. (C) Irish Department of Foreign Affairs America's Director Darach MacFhionnbhairr told the Embassy December 29 that Martin's visit comes in the context of the recent EU decision to lift diplomatic sanctions following the 2003 crackdown on dissidents on the island. MacFhoinbhairr added that "Martin will follow standard EU policy on Cuba" during the visit, which is intended to send a signal of encouragement to the Cuban government to "move on." Martin has not yet approved a program for the one-and-a-half day visit, but he is likely to meet with Raul Castro. No decision has been taken yet on whether he would meet with dissidents while in Cuba, according to MacFhoinbhairr. Martin will travel to Cuba during the week of February 16; he will also spend two days on an official visit to Mexico as part of this trip.

Guantanamo

¶4. (U) Martin also told the press on December 28 that Ireland will consider accepting detainees from the U.S. facility at Guantanamo. He highlighted that the Irish cabinet still had to take a decision and that any potential detainees would be carefully screened. Martin stressed, however, that accepting detainees was a logical follow-up from Ireland's call for the facility to be closed: "If we're against the torture and the nature of what went on at Guantanamo, and there are concerns in terms of international human rights and humanitarian law, there's a logical follow-through on that." Martin added that Ireland would only accept those detainees with no terrorist links.

¶5. (C) MacFhoinbhairr claimed to be surprised by Martin's Guantanamo statements and stressed that there was no link between Martin's upcoming Cuba visit and his public position about accepting Guantanamo detainees. MacFhoinbhairr noted that it was still unsettled whether Ireland would accept any Guantanamo detainees, with Justice Minister Dermot Ahern leading the nay-sayers (closely supported by departing

Foreign Affairs Secretary General Dermot Gallagher and Justice Secretary General Sean Aylward). In early December, in response to a planted question in the Irish Parliament, Justice Minister Ahern stated that Ireland had no intention to accept any Guantanamo detainees.

¶6. (C) MacFhoibhairr told the Embassy that EU Ministers would take up the issue of Guantanamo detainees at their January 8 Gymnich meeting in Prague. Ireland hoped that the Gymnich will decide an EU-wide approach to Guantanamo that can be rolled out "in response to a proposed closure plan from the new U.S. administration" a few weeks later. (Note: No formal EU decisions can be adopted at a Gymnich meeting but they can be tee'd up for adoption at the next EU Council meeting. End note.)

¶7. (C) MacFhoibhairr commented that, although Portugal tried to get a leg up in the matter via its December 11 letter from Foreign Minister Amado, Germany remains the key to achieving a common EU position. MacFhoibhairr reported that Denmark and Austria lead EU Member States opposed to an EU plan. He suggested that internal divisions in Germany have prevented Germany from pushing a more forward leaning stance, leading sometimes to mixed signals: when Cowen met with Merkel earlier in December, for example, she did not raise the issue, to Cowen's surprise.

Comment

¶8. (C) Martin's press announcement on Guantanamo should be seen in the context of the internal Irish government debate,

DUBLIN 00000707 002 OF 002

which Martin hopes to turn to his favor. If Ireland determines that it will accept Guantanamo detainees, based on earlier conversations with Irish officials, we should expect that Ireland would accept no more than five detainees for re-settlement.
FAUCHER